№ 245

Day of National Mourning, in commemoration of President Lincoln.

2 Sam. XIX 2,3. And the victory that day was turned into mourning unto all the people. And the people gat them by stealth that day into the city, as people being ashamed steal away when they flee in battle.

Ps. 64. 1, 4, 5.

Ps. 135. 1, 2, 8.

Col. "Almighty God, the fountain of all wisdom," &c.

May 31. 1865.

Incarnation. National Fast. June 1. 1865. A. M.

2 Sam. XIX. 2, 3.

I need hardly explain the application of these words to the circumstances wh. have brought us together. The kingdom of Israel, under David, had been threatened by a formidable insurrection, led by Absalom, David's son. By his personal attractions, & by the artful measures he adopted, Absalom had "stolen the hearts of the men of Israel," &, having proclaimed himself king, gathered round him the great body of the people. David had fled fr. Jerusalem to a place beyond the Jordan; & Absalom, joined by Ahithophel, the king's own counsellor, had taken possession of the throne. But, at length, a sanguinary battle had been fought, in wh. the

forces of the rebellion were signally defeated,
many thousands being slain, & the
remainder put to flight; while Absalom
himself had become entangled in the
branches of a tree, in attempting to escape,
& his body, pierced thro' with darts, had
been cast into a pit. Great was the
rejoicing of the people over this result; &
profound must have been their thankfulness
as they beheld the rebellion ended, &
looked forward to the speedy re-establishment
of peace & prosperity throughout the kingdom.
But, in the midst of their demonstrations
of joy, it was told them how David
was grieved for his son; & partly, it
wd appear, because of their loyal attachment
to the king, & partly because he seemed

by his excessive mourning to repent of their success, their exultation was instantly turned into sorrow & dejection. They forgot for a while the advantages they had gained; & victors tho' they were, they "got them by stealth that day into the city, as ~~men~~ people being ashamed steal away when they flee in battle."

In one respect, there is no analogy bet. this remarkable incident in the sacred history, & that passage in our own national experience with wh. we have connected it. There probably is no other case upon record, of a sudden transition fr. great rejoicing to great mourning, in wh. the grief has been caused by the death of the arch-rebel,

whose overthrow has been also the occasion of the joy. But, in all other points, the likeness is sufficiently complete. The only material difference we can trace, lies in the circumstance, that in our case, the deep sorrow wh. pervades the land, in the hour of its triumph, has not been awakened by sympathy with another, in his affliction, but by the sense of personal loss. It is every man's own bereavement, wh. has cast this heavy pall over the country at such an unexpected moment. The blow has fallen upon ourselves. The hand of the assassin has stricken down our chosen representative & head in the past bloody struggle — the one in whose hands we placed our own prerogative

& power. The murderer has killed the great leader whom we trusted in, & to whom we were willing to confide, for the second time, & as long as the practice of the country shd allow, the transcendent interests wh. we had at stake. We mourn over the loss of one who was closely identified with all that is dearest to us. We have been bereft of him, who, not merely in virtue of his official station, but because of his large-hearted sympathy & devoted efforts, had become associated in our minds with all that the nation has been contending for — whose name sh. go down to the end of time expressive of every thing that is good & sacred in

national integrity & human freedom.

Never shd any of us forget that Saturday before Easter, when the astounding intelligence reached us. It was a time of great joy & of mutual congratulations. The rebellion of four years — the fruit of the plottings & preparations of many more years than that — was virtually ended. The central city & stronghold of treason had fallen, & the main army of the insurgents had surrendered. The leader of the rebellion was a fugitive. The day before, the old flag had been hoisted again upon the fort, whose shapeless mass of ruins was a true picture of the horrors & desolations wh. had fallen upon the land since the day, so long ago,

when that flag had been trodden in the dust. Never in our time at least, had the city been so delirious with joy. The schools were dismissed, the factories were closed., Processions, formed into line without notice, paraded the streets. No one knew what to do. Few cd do any thing in their accustomed way. The ~~whole~~ whole town was mad; & no one cd accuse his neighbor of foolishness wh. he was guilty of himself. In three nights more, ~~the~~ ~~was~~ city was to be illuminated, & all were preparing for a spectacle such as had rarely been seen, & might never be seen again among us. — Thus was it, when we awoke that Saturday morning, & heard that the President was

dead — dead, too, under circumstances wh. have since thrilled & paralyzed, for the moment, the whole civilized & the world. I cannot attempt to describe that revulsion of feeling wh. ensued. The strong wept like the weakest. Grief & disappointment & mortification sought relief in expressions of horror at the infamous deed, &, too often, in cries, not merely for justice, but for revenge. It seemed that the malignity of years & years had been concentrated in this one act of perfidy & treason. We almost forgot that the day was ours upon the battle-field; we were "like people who, being ashamed, steal away when they flee in battle." There have been no more illuminations

Stores, factories & schools have been closed, but only that Churches might be opened, & that men & women & children might pray, & lament for themselves & the dead! We have lost the power to rejoice as we did before. The disbanding of other portions of the rebel army, - the capture of the prime agents in the attempted dissolution of the Union, - the confession coming fr. many parts of the Southern States that the rebellion is a failure, & that the principles on wh. it was began have fallen with it, - have been received with no spontaneous gatherings of the people, no tumultuous ringing of bells & jubilant acclamations. The universal grief & consternation still

holds possession of the popular mind, &, under its subduing influence, men are witnessing the rapid progress of restoration with a degree of apparent indifference wh. is strange & wonderful to themselves.

Thus has it happened, that we are called together in our day of victory, not to give thanks, but to offer solemn litanies, as expressive of our sorrow, & in supplication of God's mercy. And I cannot but feel, my brethr., that we have here another evidence that God is ruling in our land. Whether the late President was less suited than his successor, as some think, to grapple with the questions wh. are now arising, & whether this is probably the reason why he has been taken away, this is

scarcely the proper time & place to inquire: I wd rather spend the few moments wh. are allotted me, in endeavoring to show how the simple fact of his death, occurring when it has, is one more, added to the many tokens, of a just & ~~gracious~~ righteous Providence in our affairs. When we think of all the circumstances of our dreadful struggle, & reflect, as we have so often admitted, that the actual sin has not been confined to one section of the country, we will all perhaps allow, that we need the lessons, wh. nothing cd have taught us so forcibly, as this sudden conversion of gladness into mourning, just when we felt that our victory was complete. It was not unnatural, to be overpowered

with joy at ~~the~~ our final success, it was right, & it will still be right, that we sh^d manifest our happiness & our gratitude, in all customary & proper ways; but there were other things to be thought of, than our victories — important facts relating to those who have laid down their arms, & solemn truths wh. come home most closely to ourselves. And God, we may believe, has been calling us back to these, in making the day of our triumph the day of our severest visitation.

It may seem, that, in one respect, the recent fearful tragedy is likely to prove unfortunate, namely, in hindering that brotherly union & concord bet. the different portions of the country, wh., we

cannot doubt, is one of the ends wh. God is seeking to promote. There is some reason to hope, however, that, while the act of assassination itself will be found to have intensified popular feeling against the spirit of the rebellion, the check wh. it has given to our boisterous exultation over success, will render the restoration of harmony bet. ourselves & the people of the Rebellion, more easy. Tho' they have fought against us, they are, & always have been, &, we think God, are still to be, our countrymen. Tho' they have differed fr. us in many points of social practice & sectional prejudice, they were wont to love our common institutions, & to take pride in our

& to have emphasized the demands of justice upon the authors of the mischief

common greatness & renown. And tho',
for a while, they have been alienated fr.
us, both in appearance & in heart, they
are to be brought back again to their
former ties, & to be received by us as
fellow-citizens, & as full sharers in our
national destiny. Many of them, too, are
but little responsible for the attempt in
wh. they have now failed. Their fault
was, in listening to the specious &
inflammable declarations of a few. Their
eyes were blinded, & they thought they were
doing what was best. They came, at
last, to believe that they were cruelly
injured & assailed; & so, to escape fr.
slavery, they paid, they strove against us,
till they c? strive no longer. Think you

not, that we will hereafter be glad to remember, that, in the day of their defeat, we did not forget that they were our brethern? And may we not believe that God has seen in our rejoicings dispositions hostile to the speedy return of fraternal union & confidence? At least, does He not seem to have been reminding us, that we may not triumph over the people of the South, as over a foreign foe, but rather use our successes as opportunities to soothe their irritation, & to prove our desire to be one with them in sentiment & feeling, as well as in name? Let us pray, that all may take this view of the late dreadful occurrence. We may pardon

that first ebullition of passion, wh.
maintained that every claim upon our
kindly treatment was at last destroyed.
That storm of indignation is fast subsiding,
& there is room for better feelings. The
time will come, when the South, no less
than the North, wh. both execrate the
hateful deed of the assassin, & rejoice that
the war has ended in the perpetuation of
the Union, & its re-establishment upon
stronger & more durable foundations. In the
mean while, let us cherish whatever tends
to bring us together more firmly, & to
blot out the recollection of the deadly
strife wh. has separated us so widely.

And such will be the effect of
our present mourning, if we lay to heart

another, & still more ~~important~~ pertinent thoughts, wh. God is evidently recalling to us now. It cannot be denied, that we have every reason for gladness & thanksgiving at the result wh. has now been reached; but our rejoicings shd be with humility & fear. If we have been honest in our confessions in the past, we have deeply felt that the war was a chastisement for sins in wh. the whole people have had a part. How far it has resulted in changing our national character, the future only can disclose; but that we needed correction, & that it was only thro' suffering & endurance that we cd be fitted for the position wh. we seemed destined to fill, we have fully admitted. We have had all

the weaknesses of a great nation in its
we have all shared; in no little measure, those very tempers wh. led to the rebellion;
vigorous & boastful youth," & God has been
as well as in the responsibility for the great national faults & shame;
leading us thro' the fires, to humble us,
to teach us wisdom & justice, to remind us of
what it is that exalteth a nation, & what
is the one glaring reproach of a people. It
becomes us, therefore — now that He has given
us rest fr. our afflictions — to be cautious &
circumspect in the manner in wh. we
hail this relief, & glory in the happy
achievements wh. He has granted us to
attain. It is only a fancy, that He has
turned the hour of our triumph into the
hour of weeping & dismay, in order to show
us how little we have deserved the victory,
& how meekly we ought to receive it? Surely
there is such a meaning in that

wondrous providence, wh. withheld the assassin's hand until the triumph had unquestionably come, & then, when the rising sun was just greeting once more the re-instated flag on Sumpter, & the shout of the conqueror was raised throughout the land, permitted the horrible deed. What else can be the import of that remarkable scene, of the victorious legions returning fr. the war with sword-hilts & banners draped in black? There is a deeper significance, than the one wh. lies upon the surface. It calls us back to our own transgressions & unworthiness. It bids us say, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name, be the praise, for Thy loving-mercy's sake!" As

we took the sword, four years ago,
acknowledging the justice of the punishment
inflicted upon ourselves, tho' believing in
the righteousness of the cause wh. we were
determined to uphold; so ch? we sheath
it now, not only with gratitude that
our cause has been maintained, but
with even a deeper conviction that we
have merited only the displeasure of God.
It is proper, that our days of humiliation
ch? not be confined to the period of
strife, but that there ch? be one more,
when the strife is over, & the objects of
the struggle is secured. It is fitting, that
we ch? now confess, "It is of the Lord's
mercies that we are not consumed." He
has spared us, when we deserved still

greater punishment, & in His wrath has remembered mercy. It behooves us to ascribe all that we have attained, to His unfailing compassions; & now, especially, that He has crowned our efforts with victory, & granted liberty to the enslaved, & given stability to our institutions, Oh, may He forbid that we shd cease to humble ourselves, & to own our indebtedness to His long-suffering & grace!

It may be added, that, if we look at the special sin of those who have been in rebellion, & regard the ends wh. have been gained as part of the divine plan for the regeneration of our country, the late calamity has had another purpose, wh. is, to remind us that the victory is not our's, but God's. We have been the

instruments in His hands, to do His work, & never has there been a history in wh. His providence has been more clearly visible, or in wh. the honor of the results has been more plainly His own. There have been periods when we were almost ready to despair. Every thing that we had hoped & prayed for, seemed to be hanging by a thread. In some instances, disastrous defeats left us nothing but our faith. But God was carrying out His designs according to His own wise methods; &, after leading us by ways wh. we knew not, He has finally brought us out into a place of wh. the most sanguine expectation scarcely dreamed. And now, if His sovereign act in striking

down the head of the nation in the very flush of our triumph, shd impress this truth upon us more forcibly, we sh. feel that it has been good. And then, as we fold up the record of these most sorrowful years, & commit it to the holy keeping of the past, we sh. be better prepared to recognise the presence & governance of God in the duties & the events wh. lie before us.

Of the life & character of him who has been taken fr. us, there is no occasion to say anything. His memory is enshrined where it can never grow dim. His eulogy has been written by thousands of pens, & spoken fr. tens of thousands of lips, all over the world. We thank God, that the day of weeping for him came not,

until the country was strong to endure it.
We thank God, that the most conspicuous
mourners that followed his coffin, were
the heroes of many battle-fields, returning
to their homes. They have laid over his
body the dear banner of peace; & they have
engraved it upon his tomb, that his work
was finished, & that he was ready for
his rest.

In conclusion, let us pray God to
purge us of the sins of wh. we are still
guilty, & to give us the good things of
wh. we are still in need! May he teach
us to hate pride, vain-glory, rebellion &
slavery, in all their forms! May the death
of the President, with all its terrible
circumstances, be fully "sanctified to the

nation"! May the benediction of grace rest upon his successor, & upon all who are in authority over us! May the awful crime wh. has now been introduced into the country, find no abiding-place in the thoughts & practices of any of ~~the~~ our people! And may all the wounds of the nation be speedily healed! May God put pity into the hearts of the North, for the grievous afflictions of the South, & grant that the proffered kindness & sympathy may be as frankly & as cordially accepted! May the wildernesses & the solitary places again be glad, & the deserts rejoice & blossom, as in the happy days of old!